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Post 7/9/79

FBI Kept Dossier on Helen Keller

Teen-agers' sick jokes about deaf and blind people are known as "Helen Keller jokes," after that remarkable woman and distinguished American whose triumph over her handicaps was an inspiration to millions the world over.

But the sickest Helen Keller joke of all was perpetrated, not by teen-agers, but by the late director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover. His near-hysterical suspicion of anyone who did not measure up to his rigid standard of red-white-and-blue Americanism led him to maintain a detailed investigative file on Keller until her death in 1968 at age 87.

We have obtained Helen Keller's FBI dossier—44 pages of incredible trivia. It tells us little about Keller. But it tells us a lot about J. Edgar Hoover, the self-appointed guardian of America's political morality for half a century.

The idea of the FBI running its number on Keller would almost be funny if it weren't such a sad commentary on Hoover and the anticommunist paranoia he so effectively cultivated in the American public.

Helen Keller was born June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, Ala. When she was 19 months old, illness left her blind and deaf (and therefore mute). Under the tutelage of another remarkable woman, Annie Sullivan, she learned to speak, read and write. She went to college and was the author of 11 books.

But to the FBI, Keller was a "writer on radical subjects."

There are many references in Keller's FBI file to her support of the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The brigade was made up of

American volunteers—mostly idealistic college students—who fought for the republican government of Spain against Francisco Franco's fascist rebels in the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s. There were enough communists in the Lincoln Brigade to taint every survivor or supporter in the Red Scare that gripped the United States in the years after World War II.

The FBI file, which is stamped "Security Information Confidential," also notes that "Helen Keller, blind author and educator, was one of a group of individuals sending messages of condolence on the occasion of the funeral of Mother (Ella Reeve) Bloor, well-known Communist Party member, on August 14, 1951."

Even worse, by Hoover's standards, "Helen Keller has sent loving birthday greetings to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a prominent communist leader, on her 65th birthday," according to the FBI dossier.

Keller also was one of the signers of a letter to the Speaker of the House in March 1948, protesting the red-baiting activities of the notorious House Un-American Activities Committee. This transgression was duly recorded in her FBI dossier.

Krogh's Courage: Leon Jaworski, the patient, dogged special prosecutor who finally brought down Richard Nixon and his Watergate gang, recently sent us a footnote to the nation's greatest political scandal.

While addressing the student body at the University of California in Berkeley, Jaworski wrote, he was handed a note as he entered the auditorium. It was from Egil (Bud) Krogh,

who directed Nixon's political espionage from a room in the White House basement.

Krogh eventually wound up in prison for his illegal activity. Now rehabilitated, he teaches government ethics at a San Francisco college. His note simply was to say hello.

"During the course of my address," Jaworski wrote, "I referred to the tragedy of the Watergate figures who had fame in their hands and had sunk to infamy because they embraced evil rather than good. I mentioned that one of them was in the audience—one who had duly recanted, unlike his former boss."

During the question-and-answer session, Jaworski was asked to identify the man he had referred to. He refused, but suggested that perhaps the Watergate figure would be willing to identify himself.

"I paused—then slowly Bud Krogh rose, and spontaneously a thunderous applause swept throughout the audience," Jaworski wrote, adding in conclusion: "What a pity that Nixon could not bring himself around to doing likewise."

Teng's Wit: During his recent U.S. visit, China's diminutive but durable Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping impressed his hosts with his shrewd wit.

During a closed-door discussion, he was asked whether there had been any opposition inside China to the normalization of Chinese-American relations.

"Yes," he said.

Would he identify where the opposition had centered?

"Yes," he responded again. "In Taiwan."